The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) Annual Report 2022/23

The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) Annual Report 2022/23  
  
April 2022–June 2023

Highlights

Key Outcomes of COMNAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) 34 (2022)

Online on 8−16 June, & 21, 25−27 July 2022. Plenary business, regional and expert group sessions were the main components. 266 representatives from Member and Observer programmes and four invited expert organisations participated. The AGM considered Canada’s application for COMNAP Membership. After discussion, the National Antarctic Programme of Canada, as represented by lead agency Polar Knowledge Canada (PKC), was accepted by consensus as a COMNAP Member. The AGM recognised the Arctic & Antarctic research programme being facilitated through PKC, including through their world-class Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS). COMNAP Membership is 32 Member and 5 Observer programmes (see Attachment Table 1).

Programmes freely exchanged and further developed their expertise during Expert Group forums (see Attachment Table 2c): Air Operations, Advancing Critical Technologies, Safety, Education, Outreach & Training, Marine Platforms, Environmental Protection, Science Facilitation, and the Joint Expert Group on Human Biology and Medicine (JEGHBM). COMNAP Members endorsed a draft policy “Welcoming the Power of Diversity within our Membership” with a commitment to contribute to positive change and ensure everyone who works in Antarctica feels safe, respected and welcomed.

Regional sessions (see Attachment Table 2d) were: Peninsula, Ross Sea, East Antarctica, Larsemann Hills Management Group, Dronning Maud Land, and High Plateau. National Antarctic Programmes exchanged 2022/23 pre-season information with most confirming plans to return to pre-pandemic levels of activity. Through collaboration, National Antarctic Programmes are actively supporting and coordinating international efforts to provide globally important data from all Antarctic regions from terrestrial, marine and atmospheric environments. Antarctic research is enabled by a multitude of key scientific infrastructure, facilities and support platforms operated by many countries.

Projects related to modernisation of aging infrastructure that will improve environmental performance and support to science continued. Route-proved land traverse operations in support of deep field science, including those related to recovery and return of “oldest ice” cores were confirmed. Several programmes highlighted advanced capabilities related to new icebreaker class, research vessels that dramatically increase marine research possibilities.

Advancements on COMNAP projects were noted and the Antarctic Aviation Project completed. The AGM acknowledged the outstanding work and commitment of all persons who contribute to the implementation of their countries’ Antarctic strategies recognising that each persons’ contribution matters and is fundamental to our collective success.

The series of COMNAP Townhall Meetings (online April 2022) were instrumental for pre-season information sharing. In addition to the challenges that the global pandemic presented, availability of fuel for ship operations was identified as a challenge for the 2022/23 Antarctic season, recruitment of personnel for Antarctic deployment was identified as more difficult than usual, and the projection of significantly increased tourist numbers, particularly in the Antarctic Peninsula, region was noted.

COVID-19 Preparedness Continued

We worked together to navigate our way through the global pandemic. During the early days of the outbreak, COMNAP developed guidelines that adopted an elimination strategy and all programmes’ commitment to, and strict implementation of, that strategy gave assurances to governments that enabled transiting of Antarctic expeditioners at a time when almost all international travel was cancelled and borders were officially closed to all foreign nationals. The guidelines also ensured there were no COVID-19-related deaths in Antarctica within National Antarctic Programmes.

As vaccines became more readily available and immunity increased, risk reduced and the world moved from elimination to mitigation practices. COMNAP considered this move carefully. On 28 July 2022, COMNAP Members adopted the “COMNAP COVID-19 Outbreak Mitigation & Management Guidelines for the 2022/23 Antarctic Season”. The revised strategy recognised that cases would be identified in National Antarctic Programme personnel in the Antarctic Treaty Area but that risk of morbidity and mortality had significantly decreased. National Antarctic Programmes committed to strict hygiene practices and did risk analysis and response based on their specific set of circumstances. The mitigation strategy has proved very successful with National Antarctic Programmes reporting no loss of life in Antarctica due to COVID-19.

We continue to assess our guidance to Programmes based on WHO information. The COMNAP COVID-19 *ad hoc* Subcommittee remains convened and the JEGHBM stands ready to provide advice including through telemedicine to any Programme that requests assistance for any medical circumstance. COMNAP continues to share best practice and technical information related to the prevention of reverse zoonosis from direct human contact to Antarctic species.

International Collaboration

The global pandemic brought with it the need to reduce our normal levels of international collaborations. There is now an opportunity to return to high levels.

International collaboration is a hallmark of Antarctic activity and is not limited to scientific research collaborations. Collaboration extends to vessels, to operations, logistics, transport of personnel utilizing aircraft and to opportunities for collaboration and exchange of personnel at home institutions and labs to name only a few. National Antarctic Programmes collaborate on a range of education activities, on Antarctic weather forecasting, Search & Rescue (SAR) coordination and response, and maintain and open data repositories and sample collections to international experts.

COMNAP is also collaborating with SCAR and IAATO on a range of topics and issues including to support and promote the early career persons’ fellowship schemes, and since July 2022, on the heightened risk of avian flu presenting in Antarctic species (See joint SCAR, COMNAP, IAATO IP to this ATCM for further information).

All these collaborations are not a snapshot in time, but are part of long-term continuous cooperation in the spirit of the Antarctic Treaty (see examples in COMNAP ATCM XXII (1998) IP7 “Scientific and Operational Cooperation” and COMNAP ATCM XXVII (2014) IP047 “International Scientific and Logistic Collaboration in Antarctica”). The COMNAP meetings provide the opportunities to build on these strong collaborative relationships and identify ways to increase cooperative activities for the benefit of all based on trust.

COMNAP Projects (For the full list of Projects and Project Managers, see Attachment Table 2b.)

**SAR Workshop 5 (2023)**   
(See COMNAP IP to this ATCM for further information). The COMNAP Antarctic SAR Workshop 5, will be held in Hobart, Australia, 23 & 24 June 2023, hosted by the Australian Antarctic Division. All RCCs with Antarctic responsibilities have confirmed their participation, including through Steering Committee membership.

**Earthquake, Tsunami, Volcanic, Natural Hazards Events Awareness**

(See COMNAP IP to this ATCM for further information). COMNAP convened (online) “Towards a regional network for seismic surveillance in the Peninsula region” on 18 October 2022 attended by participants from ten National Antarctic Programmes. The aim was to discuss the intention to create a network to connect currently placed seismic systems in the Antarctic Peninsula. An April 2023 online meeting will serve to advance plan for further in-person discussion during the COMNAP AGM 35 (June 2023). COMNAP has reviewed our “Tsunami Awareness in Antarctica” (July 2014) brochure. The updated brochure will be finalised at COMNAP AGM 35 and distributed thereafter.

Antarctic Research Fellowships  
<https://www.comnap.aq/comnap-antarctic-fellowships>  
COMNAP provided support for two early career persons:   
1. COMNAP Antarctic Research Fellowship 2022 to Aanchal Jain (Universidad Mayor, Chile) “Policy analysis to curb plastic pollution in Antarctic environments”, working with the British Antarctic Survey, United Kingdom.   
2. Joint IAATO/COMNAP Antarctic Fellowship 2022 to Antonio Polo Sánchez (Universidad de Salamanca, Spain) “Constraining the eruptive mechanisms of Three Sisters, Orca and Deception Island volcanoes (Bransfield Strait, Antarctica) through Noble Gases isotopic ratios. Implications for Geochemical Monitoring (BRANSVOLC)”, working with the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology, Palermo, Italy.

COMNAP Products and Tools

**Website & Database**

The move of the COMNAP website, database and Member’s only documents to their new platforms is complete. The database and Member’s only documents require username/password, with various portions of the data shared with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat. The website is public with publicly available data also available from:

<https://www.comnap.aq/antarctic-facilities-information> <https://github.com/PolarGeospatialCenter/comnap-antarctic-facilities/releases> <https://github.com/PolarGeospatialCenter/comnap-antarctic-vessels>.

**Antarctic Flight Information Manual (e-AFIM)**

[COMNAP e-AFIM general information](https://www.comnap.aq/air-operations)

e-AFIM is a handbook of aeronautical information published in PDF format as a tool towards safe air operations in Antarctica as per ATCM Resolution 6 (2021). Releases were: 21-04 (15 March 2022); 22-01 (15 September 2022); 22-02 (20 October 2022); and 22-03 (15 March 2023).

**COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS)**[COMNAP Asset Tracking System general information](https://www.comnap.aq/projects)

CATS is a voluntary information exchange system developed by the Australian Antarctic Division to display positional information for situation-awareness of vessels and aircraft. For the 2022/23, CATS contained positions for 63 assets. We are exploring a new system as a replacement for CATS.

**Antarctic Telecommunications Operators Manual (ATOM)**

ATOM is the collection of contact details to which ATCM Recommendation X-3 refers. Access is via the COMNAP database and the CATS. Update of the ATOM is in real-time, meaning, when a National Antarctic Programme updates their information in the COMNAP database, the field is automatically updated in the online (downloadable) ATOM.

**SAR**As per ATCM Resolution 4 (2013), COMNAP provides a SAR webpage of all RCC contacts.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

[www.comnap.aq](http://www.comnap.aq/) | @comnap1 | YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjzR1uM_ZP62eEy6QLCbHxw>

Attachment: Statistics

Formally established in September 1988 to develop and promote best practice in managing the support of scientific research in the Antarctic; 2023 marks the 35th year of COMNAP. Our headquarters, the COMNAP Secretariat, moved to new facilities on the campus of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand (MOU to Sept 2027).

Table 1: Our Membership

Member programmes from 32 Antarctic Treaty and Environmental Protocol countries:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Argentina | Australia | Belgium | Brazil | Bulgaria |
| Canada | Chile | China | Czech Republic | Ecuador |
| Finland | France | Germany | India | Italy |
| Japan | Netherlands | New Zealand | Norway | Peru |
| Poland | Republic of Belarus | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | South Africa |
| Spain | Sweden | Ukraine | United Kingdom | United States |
| Uruguay | Türkiye |

In addition, five Observer programmes from:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Colombia | Malaysia | Portugal | Switzerland | Venezuela |

Table 2: Our Leadership

a. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) is six elected officers plus the appointed Executive Secretary:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| EXCOM Officers | **Topic Portfolios** | **Term** |
| Chair: Antonio Quesada (CPE) | Science Facilitation, Medical | 2021–24 |
| Vice Chairs: |  |  |
| Charlton Clark (AAD) | Air Operations, Marine Platforms | 2021–23 |
| Gen Hashida (NIPR) | Environmental Protection, Marine Platforms | 2020–23 |
| Pavel Kapler (CARP) | Advancing Critical Technologies, Safety | 2021–23 |
| Dragomir Mateev (BAI) | Education, Outreach & Training, Safety | 2021–24 |
| Patricia Ortúzar (DNA) | Air Operations, Environmental Protection | 2021–24 |
| Executive Secretary: Michelle Rogan-Finnemore | Medical | to 2027 |

b. COMNAP Projects:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project Leaders** | **Project** |
| Robb Clifton (AAD) | COMNAP Asset Tracking System (CATS) |
| Michelle Rogan-Finnemore &  Tim Heitland (AWI) | COVID-19 Outbreak Mitigation & Management Response; includes the COVID-19 *ad hoc* Subcommittee |
| Andrea Colombo | Database & Document Migration |
| Andrea Colombo | Earthquake, Tsunami & Volcanic Events Awareness |
| Agnieszka Kruszewska (PAS) | Efficiency Task Force: Peninsula (Phase 2) |
| Charlton Clark (AAD) | Antarctic Search & Rescue (SAR) Workshop 5 |

c. COMNAP Expert Groups

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Expert Group Leaders** | **Expert Group Topic** |
| Özgün Oktar (TÜBITAK) &  Mike Rose (BAS) | Advancing Critical Technologies |
| Rod Arnold (BAS) &  Sven Lidström (NPI) | Air Operations; includes the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Working Group |
| Ceisha Poirot (ANZ) | Environmental Protection |
| Andrea Peña-Aguirre (INACH) | Education, Outreach & Training |
| Giichiro Ohno (NIPR) | Joint Expert Group on Human Biology & Medicine |
| Miguel Ojeda (CPE) | Marine Platforms |
| Simon Trotter (ANZ) | Safety; includes Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, & Harassment Prevention |
| Robb Clifton (AAD) | Science Facilitation |
| d. COMNAP Regional Break-out Groups | |
| Regional Group Conveners | **Collaboration Region (informal)** |
| Uwe Nixdorf (AWI) | Dronning Maud Land |
| Charlton Clark (AAD) | East Antarctica |
| Margaret Knuth (NSF USAP) | High Plateau |
| Shailendra Saini (NCPOR) | Larsemann Hills Management Group |
| Agnieszka Kruszewska (PAS) | Peninsula |
| Simon Trotter (ANZ) | Ross Sea |

**Table 3: Meetings**

***From 1 April 2022 through 1 June 2023***

* COMNAP Townhall Meetings (online): 20, 21, 27 & 28 April 2022.
* COMNAP AGM XXXIV (2022) (online): including Expert Group Topical Discussion Forums on 8, 9, 10, 15 & 16 June 2022 and 25 July 2022; and Regional Break-out Group Discussions on 25, 26 & 27 July; and Plenary sessions on 27 July 2022.
* COMNAP EXCOM Meetings: 3 & 4 June 2022 (in-person, Madrid, Spain); 27 September 2022 (online); 1 December 2022 (online); 7 March 2023 (online).

***Upcoming***

Full information on all the 2023 COMNAP Meetings can be found at <https://www.comnap.aq/annual-general-meeting>.

* The COMNAP SAR Workshop 5, Hobart, Australia, 23 & 24 June 2023.
* The joint COMNAP & SCAR EXCOM Meeting (hybrid format), Hobart, Australia, 25 June 2023.
* The 20th COMNAP Symposium “Innovations & Collaborations” will be held as a hybrid event. Video and in-person presentations, posters and keynote presentations with a resulting Proceeding publication, Hobart, Australia, 26 June 2023.
* The 35th COMNAP AGM, Hobart, Australia, 27–29 June 2023.
* The 36th COMNAP AGM (2024), hosted by Dirección Nacional del Antártico, Argentina, tentative dates are 14, 15 & 16 August 2024.

**Table 4: COMNAP representatives/participants in other fora**

* **Antonio Quesada**, COMNAP Chair & MNAP Spanish Polar Committee (CPE), invited radio interview “Comunidad científica de la Antártida” (Antarctic Scientific Community), with **Sonia Ramos** (CPE), <https://www.rtve.es/play/audios/a-golpe-de-bit/golpe-bit-comunidad-cientifica-antartida-20-12-22/6760883/>, 20 December 2022.
* **Patricia Ortúzar**, Vice Chair, participated in and tabled COMNAP information at the Reunión de Administradores de Programas Antárticos Latinoamericanos (RAPAL) Meeting XXXIII, 23–25 August 2022; COMNAP delegate to the 23rd International Ice Charting Working Group (IICWG) Meeting, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 26–30 September 2022.
* **Michelle Rogan-Finnemore**, Executive Secretary, co-author (with CCAMLR Secretariat and IAATO Secretariat, Lisa Kelley presenting author) on “Vessel Patterns/Trends during a typical Antarctic Season” to the 23rd International Ice Charting Working Group (IICWG) Meeting, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 30 September 2022; Invited panellist on the “Days of Ice Asian National Antarctic Programmes in Antarctica” public engagement, 3 October 2022; Invited presenter “The Role of COMNAP”, 7 October 2022, New Zealand Antarctic Society public engagement; Attendee " The Future of Work and Workforces In The Antarctic And Southern Ocean" Conference, IMAS, Hobart, Australia, 1 December 2022; Attendee “World Meteorological Organization (WMO) World Weather Research Programme (WWRP) Polar Research Project Plenary Discussions”, Hobart, Australia, 18 April 2022.
* **John Guldahl**, DMNAP Norwegian Polar Institute, COMNAP representative to the SCAR RINGS Action Group Workshop, 27–30 June 2022.
* **Agnieszka Kruszewska**, MNAP Poland National Antarctic Programme, COMNAP representative on the SCAR Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Group and invited speaker at the SCAR Open Science Conference Workshop on Inclusive Collaborations in Antarctic Research”, co-author of “Welcoming the Power of Diversity in our Membership”, 9 August 2022.
* **Dirk Mengedoht**, Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research, COMNAP representative to the Forum of Arctic Research Operators (FARO) at the Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW), presented “COMNAP: An Update”, 17 February 2023, Vienna, Austria.
* **Sonia Ramos**, Comité Polar Español, COMNAP representative to “The future of Antarctic tourism: time to adopt a common vision and to build a basic policy program” Workshop, Paris, France, 8–10 March 2023.